

SPICY MYSTERY

STORIES
for FEB



BATMAN

by

Lew
Merrill



Was he animal or was he human? Sometimes he loved the woman who had been his fiancée; at other times he cared only for his furry mate. What had happened to John Charters?

BAT

THE glare of the lights terrified and blinded me. I crouched there, in a corner of the room, looking at the empty bed, and seeing, in the corridor beyond, women in nurses' uniforms passing from room to room.

I tried to fly, and discovered that my left wing was injured. I could only crouch there, shaking with terror, in spite of my frantic desire to fly round and round the walls of the little room, in search of some refuge beyond the reach of earth-bound creatures.

I saw a nurse with golden hair pass along the corridor, and that hair of hers seemed to me a haven of rest. If only I could fly to it and conceal myself within it!

For I had become a bat. A bat with a man's intelligence, a man's memories, striving to emerge from a confused mass of jumbled recollections.

"He's got the brain of a bat." Who



**By
LEW
MERRILL**

MAN

had said that? Roger Dean, who had transformed me into this low form of life, by grafting my brain into the body of one of my species. Roger Dean, who was jealous of me, and wanted to supplant me with Alice!

I had been ill a long time, but I couldn't remember just what had been the matter with me. I recalled vaguely that there had been business troubles, a quarrel with Alice. I had even thought of suicide.

What did it matter? I was a bat now, and soon they would discover that I had escaped from them, and they would catch me and put me in a cage, and rob me of my blessed freedom. For we bats are only able to live in freedom. You can't cage us. We die. And Roger Dean wouldn't want me to die. He wanted to gloat over me, and show me to Alice.

If only my left wing hadn't been broken!

Something tapped softly against the window-pane. I looked up and saw another bat, and knew that it was my mate. I scrambled up the window-sill, my tiny, furry body creeping beneath the shade so silently. Then I heard a startled cry from the room. It was the golden-haired nurse.

"He's gone!" she cried. "He's gone!"

BUT I had already scrambled down the wall and was outside the hospital. Densely dark though the night was, I could see as well as by day. My mate was flitting and circling overhead, and I let her guide me. In a few minutes, scurrying on the ground, making such short flights as my wing permitted, I had passed beyond the boundaries of our little town, and was making for the old, abandoned quarries on the outskirts.

I knew them well, for, as a boy, I had traced their labyrinthine passages.

My mate circled above me, and then, with a thin shriek, darted inside. As I followed, scrambling with my bad wing, a delicious odor began to come to my nostrils, growing stronger and stronger as I penetrated to the inmost recess of the labyrinth. The odor of warm, soft bodies like my own.

The space above me was filled with the darting creatures, issuing after insects, and returning, but there were scores that remained hanging head downward from the rocky roof of the cave, splotching the walls with their dark, downy bodies. These, I knew, were mother bats, nursing their young.

Right in the midst of them was a vacant space that I knew was mine. No, ours!

I climbed up the rocks, and was welcomed with twitterings of satisfaction at

my arrival. I hung there among my fellows. Day was already dawning, and, as the dim light began to filter into the labyrinth, the remainder of the brood returned, clinging to the rocks until they covered them.

Their sleeping-time had come. The gibbering and the twittering ceased. Oh the happiness that I felt, now that I had found my own! The sweet scent, the sense of solidarity among us, as if one single mind animated us all.

Then, with a little whimpering sound, my mate crawled to my side and clung to me, fastened herself to me, her downy body against my own.

I MUST have slept through the day. I awoke to find that it was dark again. And with that awakening a dim remembrance of the past came back to me. God, I had once been a man—that brain of mine that Roger Dean had transplanted into the skull of a hideous bat! I had loved Alice, and this had been his revenge!

And here I hung in my loathsome bat-form, locked tight in the embrace of my mate, which had never ceased to cling to me through those hours of sleep. I was shut off forever from the world of human beings, from the woman whom I still loved with my human brain, though she seemed very far in the past. I must go to her, and find whether she had married Roger Dean.

Besides, with my awakening hunger, a new instinct was awakening in me. I wanted to see Alice asleep, and apply my mouth to that pretty throat of hers, drawing out the warm blood until my thirst was appeased, yet so gently that she wouldn't know.

They say the vampire bat lives only in South America. But the instinct is latent in all of us. And how could I

catch insects on the wing, crippled as I was? The taste of warm blood from Alice's veins would almost recompense me for having become the thing I was.

Already my companions were beginning to squeak and gibber as their waking time arrived. The thing that had been clinging to me now detached itself, and flitted spectrally out through the opening of the quarry. The rest took wing also.

I worked my way down to the ground and began moving silently through the streets of our town, until I reached the one on which Alice lived.

The town was dim to me, though I could see plainly in the darkness. But it required a constant and immense effort of mind to recall the days when I had walked its streets, a human being.

God, how I hated Roger Dean, when I was able to recall what he had done to me!

I would have fastened my small, keen teeth in his throat and drawn the life-blood out of it, except for Alice. She had been so gentle and compassionate. I was sure she would give me of her blood, if she knew who I was.

I reached what I thought was the house, and, scrambling up the clapboards, perched myself upon the sill, and peered in through the open window. The room was quite dark to human eyes, but perfectly visible to mine.

I saw a man and a girl embracing each other, holding each other fast in an ecstasy of passion. I could hear them speaking in low tones, and, bat though I had become, I understood what they were saying to each other.

"ROGER, darling, I'm so happy with you," the girl was saying. "Just think, it's a whole month since we came back from our honeymoon, and

we care for each other more than ever, don't we!"

I heard his voice answering, and recognized it. It was that of Roger Dean, my murderer and my rival. So he had won Alice? For a few moments the blind, impotent rage of a bat filled my heart as I realized how helpless I was.

But then the girl turned her face, laughing up into her husband's eyes, and I realized that she wasn't Alice, but a strange girl. I could see her long, smooth limbs, her breasts, crushed in the man's embrace, and her dark hair. A stranger!

So Roger Dean had discarded Alice, after performing that vile operation on me!

"You know, darling, I used to be terribly jealous of that Alice Drew," said the girl. "I was afraid you cared for her, after I had begun to love you. You did at one time, didn't you?"

"That was before I met you, sweetheart."

"And you're quite sure that you don't care for her a little bit still?"

"She's a good friend, and I want you two to be friends. But she was never anything to me from the moment that I set eyes upon you."

"That was a week after poor John Charters escaped from the hospital, wasn't it? Poor Alice, it must all have been a dreadful shock to her. Would he ever have got well?"

"Well, he had about the brain of a bat," answered Roger Dean. "A human brain functioning—what there was of it—by blind instinct. It would have been interesting to see what would have happened if he hadn't escaped and fallen into the river."

"Do you think that was his body they found?"

"Well, the head was battered out of all semblance to any human head, when the cataract carried the body over the rocks. Yet it must have been poor Charters, or he couldn't have escaped recapture—poor Charters, with his bat-brain. Don't let's talk about him, dearest. Kiss me again."

Her arms went around his neck, and she strained herself to him. I watched them, mad with fury.

She knew what he meant when he spoke of my "bat-brain." She, too, was laughing at me.

I must have made some sound, for suddenly she had started out of his arms. "Roger, what was that?" she screamed. "At the window! Look, look!"

Silently as a bat moves, I dropped from the sill and fluttered to the ground. I heard Dean shouting, and presently he came running out of the front door with a gun in his hand.

But at that same time I was hanging, quite invisible to him, in the shrubbery beside the house. After a while he went in again and closed the door.

"There's no one around here," I heard him call. "It must have been the wind at the shutter, dear."

"But I was sure I saw—I was sure I saw—" I heard her say.

MY BRAIN was working furiously; my bat's brain, through which the human emotions were trying to force a channel of thought. Why couldn't what Dean had left of it—why couldn't it function as a human brain? Were the obscure vital processes of the bat gradually destroying the human element in it?

I remembered how those two had clung together, and I remembered Alice, and the quiver of a man's desire ran through my furry body. For a while I hung in the shrubbery, shaken by pas-

sion. Then I dropped to the ground and edged softly out into the night again.

In a few minutes I had reached what I was sure was Alice's house. Again I climbed to the window and looked inside.

In the darkness I could see a girl's form lying in a bed, a thin sheet half-way over her. She was asleep, and breathing smoothly and regularly.

Very quietly I moved across the floor, trailing my broken wing, then climbed one of the bedposts and perched myself upon the pillow. The girl's face was turned away from me, but I was sure that she was Alice.

The night was warm, and only a single sheet partially covered her. I could see her body in the rumpled, sheer nightdress, the rounded orbs of her breasts, one of which drooped softly against her arm, while the other pointed invitingly toward me. A sweet, warm fragrance came from her naked throat and shoulder, making me forget the sweeter fragrance of my companions in the cave. For a moment I felt a man again.

Through the nightdress was faintly limned the flattened oval of her stomach, the curve of her full hips; underneath the edge of it the whiteness of her thighs. They were crossed, and she seemed to be dreaming happily, for there was a look of rapture on her face.

I had crept down from the pillow, to draw some blood from her, without awaking her, as we bats know how to do. All the infernal instincts of my race were alive in me. And yet—even then I had that strange illusion that I was once more a man.

I even fancied that, instead of perching there near her white throat, a little, furry creature, I was a man beside her, clasping her around her slender waist, and pressing my lips to hers.

But this wasn't Alice!

"Roger," she gasped, "what's that? Look! Look!"



I could see her face as she stirred. It was that of a woman in her early thirties, a sensuous face. And her body quivered sensuously as I applied my lips to her warm skin.

"Is that you, darling?" she whispered. "How daring of you, coming in here to-night!"

She smiled, and slowly raised her arms and closed them about the place where

my neck would have been, if I had been a man. She strained her body against where mine would have been, and I could have sworn for the moment that I was a man, and that our lips met in a throbbing kiss.

Suddenly she shrank back, and her eyes dilated. "Who are you?" she whispered in terror. "You're the—the man who breaks into houses at night and

makes love to strange women, aren't you?"

But I couldn't answer her, of course. She was still half asleep. And I was absorbed, searching for a place to apply my keen little teeth. I saw the tracery of blue veins on her neck, and I was mad with the desire for blood.

"It doesn't matter," she whispered. "I adore you for your daring."

Suddenly she shrieked as I nipped her, twittering with ecstasy, shrieked and leaped from the bed.

I HEARD her stumbling down the stairs, calling for help, and then the sound of running footsteps. But, again, for me escape was easy. I scrambled to the open window, was down the clapboards of the house in a moment, and running for the shelter of the trees in the little park.

I couldn't understand how I had got confused. By this time I was too frightened to try to find Alice again that night. I made my way back to the quarry, and sought my old resting-place. The bats were flitting in and out by scores, and, as I sought my niche, a soft, furry body flopped beside me, and an insect was thrust into my mouth.

I swallowed it mechanically, and mechanically my mouth opened again to receive another of the loathsome delicacies. My mate was bringing me food, because my wing was crippled, and I was unable to hunt for myself.

Through the remainder of the night I clung there, my mouth opening mechanically like a fledgling's, whenever she appeared beside me to thrust in another insect. To me the taste of that food was delicately rare, horrible as the memory of it is now, for by this time Alice and the past had grown very faint again. I exulted in the companionship of my fel-

low-bats, as they winged their way in and out of the cave, bringing food for their young. I felt my consciousness go out to the tribe, unite, and become one with them.

When at last dawn was approaching, my mate ceased to feed me, and snuggled up to me again. There we hung, heads downward, our bodies close together.

With dawn, the bats came winging back to sleep. Soon the wall of the rocks was once more covered with a dense cluster. Now I had forgotten everything. I lapsed into unconsciousness.

DAYS, weeks seemed to go by. I had forgotten Alice, for my mate was feeding me. And then, suddenly the desire for blood awoke in me once more.

Then one night I found myself in the street, crouching beneath Alice's window. I realized my former mistake. I had confused left and right. I had gone to the wrong side of the little park. Now I had found her.

There was no light in her window, but it was open, and, when I had clambered to the sill, to avoid startling her, I tapped, tapped with my sound wing until I heard her movements within the room. Then she said, in a steady tone:

"Who's there? Don't move! I've got a revolver. I think you're caught at last!"

"It's I. It's John Charters!" I tried to say, though of course only a thin twitter came from my mouth.

"Merciful God!" I heard her whisper.

A little shaded light beside her bed went on, and I saw her sitting on the bed looking at me, her fair hair falling about her neck, and her lovely breasts half-bare.

"John! John!" she whispered, looking at me in mingled horror and pity.

She knew me! The very force of my

love had somehow enabled us to communicate by telepathy with each other. Furry, repulsive little thing though I had become, as I scrambled toward her bed, she knew that the soul of me was the soul of the man she had loved.

Silent, rigid, white, she waited till I had scrambled up the bedclothes and perched myself upon the bed beside her knee.

"Alice," I twittered, "I see you know me. I want you to believe what I'm going to tell you. Can you understand what I am saying to you?"

And again she understood me, though my words were only the shriek of the flittermouse I was!

"Yes, John, I understand you," she answered.

"Roger Dean made me what I am, because he was jealous of our love. He operated on me in the hospital, removed my brain and placed it in the skull of a bat. I am a man in a bat's body, Alice!"

WHAT a glance, what a piteous glance she gave me, as if she had suspected all! I saw her open her lips as if to speak, then check herself.

"I'm glad that devil didn't marry you. I saw him with that woman he married."

"You? That was you?" she whispered in real terror.

"Yes, I have been looking for you so long. Oh, my dear, I was so afraid something had happened to you. If I were a man, I should ask you to let me creep into your arms and lie there. Would you?"

"Why, of course, John, darling," she answered.

"But I'm a bat, you see. I live in the quarries, and I have a mate who brings me food. Am I frightening you?"

She fixed me with that steady gaze of hers. "No, John, go on," she whispered.

"You're not afraid that I'll get into your hair?"

"No, I'm not afraid. But you can have my hair, darling. Anything you want of me."

"Oh, if only I was a man again," I sobbed. "Alice, don't be frightened when I tell you what I want. I want to drink some of your blood. May I?"

"Why, of course, John," she answered softly. "Come here to me!"

I scrambled toward her, little broken thing that I was, and nestled close to her lovely shoulder—so white, so soft and warm. Oh God, if I had been a man instead of a loathsome bat!

I put my tiny, fox-like head against her smooth throat and nuzzled there, and felt her cool hands pressing against my face, stifling the throbbing in my brain. I put my lips to her white flesh and drew a tiny fold between my sharp little teeth. The skin broke as I nipped it.

And then somehow I knew—it was just as if it had been shouted in my ear—that all my immortal future depended upon the fight which had suddenly been forced upon me. If I drank of Alice's blood, there would be no hope for me throughout all eternity. If I abstained, I might hope some day, somehow, to win back to human form, if not in this incarnation, then in a subsequent one.

IDREW my lips away. "I've hurt you, dear," I twittered.

"No," she answered. "You couldn't hurt me, John. Do anything you please to me. But let me hold you close."

I snuggled down again, and she crooned over me like a mother. Gradually my thirst for her blood abated. I was winning that fight.

I caressed her skin with my claws, fondled her smooth throat, and stroked her hair, thinking all the while how great

her love must be, that she could endure such a repulsive little thing so close to her. Then I lay passive, and let her fondle me.

"Your arm, darling, isn't it better?" she asked.

You see, she had even called my wing an arm. She was pretending that I was a man!

"Not yet," I answered. "That's why my mate feeds me. I must go back to her, Alice, and you must forget me."

"Back to the quarries, John?"

"Back to the quarries, never to see you again. I realize how I have hurt you, coming here like this. It would have been better to have let you go on thinking me dead."

"I knew you hadn't died, darling. If you had died, I should have known. I'm coming with you, John."

Remember, all this conversation was carried on by pure telepathy. How could she have understood the meaningless squeaks that issued from my lips, save through the telepathic powers of love?

"I can't—I can't let you come there," I said.

"But you can't drive me away. I'm coming, John," she answered.

"To—to see me living there? I told you I—I've got a mate there. It's not for human beings. And when I'm there, I—I forget. I become wholly a bat again. You couldn't understand the—the beauty and the glory of it."

"I'm coming with you, John," she answered. "Don't be afraid of me. My sister's away, and there's no one else in the house. Wait till I'm dressed, and I'll come with you."

"I'll wait outside," I said, and perched myself upon the window-sill.

plest, sweetest girl in the world. Why should she have wanted to hide her lovely body from a bat, even though it had a human brain? She seemed forgetful of herself entirely.

She turned away as she stripped the nightdress over her head, but that was all. I devoured her soft, boyish bosom with my eyes, and the lovely curves of her hips as she put on step-ins and stockings. And, like so many women, she sat on the floor to put her stockings on. I don't know why this little thing touched me so deeply.

Then she slipped the dress over her shoulders and put on her shoes.

"I'm ready, dear John," she said. "Let's go downstairs."

"It's easier for me to climb down the front of the house," I answered. "I'll wait for you outside."

"Oh!" she gasped, pressing her hand to her breast, and I saw the tears come into her eyes.

But I was already scrambling out of the window, and I was hardly down before the front door opened, and Alice came out. I scurried along beside her, looking up into her eyes with eager hope. Could she really be coming to the quarries, to live there with me? Could a human being understand the joy and the wonder of the bat life?

"If my wing would heal, I could fly," I said.

"Oh, John, don't speak about it," she sobbed.

So I said nothing more, but fluttered along beside her, looking up into her face every now and then to reassure myself that she wasn't weakening.

I was sure she would be afraid when we reached the entrance to the quarries, with the bats skimming in and out, but she only put both hands on her hair and followed me.

I HAD always known that Alice was no prude, just the sincerest, sim-

"There he is," she
cried. "Don't hurt
him!"



Then at last, in the dim recesses, I stopped. We could only just see the dim outlines of each other. I'm not sure that she could see my wretched little furry form at all.

"My place is on that wall," I said. "You cannot see it now, but it is just visible in the daylight."

She broke down then, convulsed with sobbing; sat down on a rocky ledge and sobbed and sobbed as if her heart was broken. I tried to comfort her, but nothing that I could say made any difference.

"That scoundrel, Dean, should pay

for his wretched work," I said, "but I'm only a bat. What can I do?"

"John, have you been living here these past three weeks?" she asked.

"Three weeks? About three days," I answered. "Ever since I escaped from the hospital."

"John, will you come with me—to a place where—you will be comfortable? No more hunting for food in garbage cans at night, and—"

"You mean the zoo," I said. "No, no, my dear, I prefer my liberty. And you're quite mistaken about the garbage cans. My mate brings me my food, because I cannot fly. I sleep all day, and it is warm and comfortable among the bats. Oh, the great peace and joy of it—if you could only know, Alice!"

She was silent for a while. Then she said, in a strained tone:

"Shall I find you here, John, when I come back?"

"You're going away?" I hadn't thought she would stay, but that hurt me.

"I've got to go away. I wasn't prepared. But I'll be back soon. You'll stay here, won't you, John?"

"Yes, I'll stay here," I answered.

I WAS hanging head downward among the rocks again, and my mate was twittering beside me. She seemed to sense that something unusual had happened, something that threatened my safety. And, because there is only a single consciousness among the bat tribe, the others seemed uneasy too.

I still remembered Alice, but in a dim way, for the blessed dawn was coming, when I could sleep and forget. I should be snugly asleep in this dark, secret paradise. I was already snuggling into my mate's embraces when there arose a sudden commotion in the cave.

Though it was dimly light, the bats were rising in scores from their resting-places, and flitting to and fro, squeaking and gibbering, till the whole interior of the quarry was alive with wings.

Then I discovered what the cause was. Three men were entering the cavern, with flashlights in their hands. The dreadful light blinded me, and terror overcame me, but, with my broken wing, I could only cling to the wall.

And now the bats were streaming out over their heads, leaving me alone. Even my faithful mate had deserted me.

"There he is!" I heard one of them say, and the torchlight, directed full at my face, was agony.

"Oh, take care! I'm afraid he'll fall! Don't let him fall!" cried another voice, in a high-pitched key.

"It's all right, Miss Draw. We've got the net spread. We'll get him down, poor fellow. John, won't you come down?" he called.

I didn't know who John was. I didn't recognize Alice's voice, didn't know that that high pitch was a mark of the human female. But I knew the voice of the man. It was the man who had mocked and tortured me.

I bared my sharp little teeth and grinned defiance at him.

"Jim," I heard him say, "run back and get that pole. We'll have to poke him out of there."

"Don't hurt him! Oh, don't hurt him! Remember he's half paralyzed!" came the high-pitched voice again.

"Don't be afraid," came the response. "We'll have him down easy and comfortable."

I GRINNED and twittered, but the two men went on talking and paid no attention to me.

"Yes, chief," said Dean, "this is un-

doubtedly John Charters, who has been breaking into houses at night and frightening women half to death. I recognized him as soon as I flashed that light, despite his beard and rags. Well, once we get him back to the hospital, we'll watch him so he won't escape again. Poor fellow, I was beginning to hope he would recover. Now, after this experience—well, I don't know."

"But this bat business—it's all batty to me. How did he get the idea he was a bat?"

"Here's my explanation, chief. When the foolish fellow fired that slug into his temple, after a perfectly causeless outbreak of jealousy about me and Miss Drew—why, we've known each other since we were kids!—he blew away the whole frontal area of the brain, instantly reducing himself to the condition of an automaton, acting by purely reflex actions, like a bird or a bat. Under such conditions, his future life would be a purely vegetative one, were it not for the fact that we have two brains, one of which is never developed.

"I was trying to induce the frontal area of the right brain to take up the task laid down by the left, which had been destroyed. Had I succeeded, he would have become a human being again. I may succeed yet. He must have heard me refer to his having the brain of a bat, and, by the power of suggestion, accepted the idea that he was a bat. But this fact gives me hopes that he may yet recover."

"I think I get you, doctor. And that paralyzed arm and leg—"

"Which he spoke of as a wing? That will pass, if ever the brain resumes activity."

"And what about those descriptions of his life as a bat, that Miss Drew picked up in this place?"

"I build my strongest hopes upon those, for it is evident that poor Charters always retained a lingering doubt whether he was not a man. It is evident that the slug, which destroyed most of the frontal lobe, missed the speaking centre, and through this Charters was able to establish connection with the external world."

"I see, doctor. It's sort of beyond me, but—here comes Jim with the pole."

"Don't hurt him!" cried Alice, and ran to the base of the wall again. "John! John, darling," she cried in piteous tones, "it's Alice! You know me. Won't you come down?"

And suddenly something seemed to click in my brain. It was as instantaneous as the click of a camera shutter. Suddenly the bat life, with all its wonder and its glory, was closed to me for ever.

Suddenly I realized that I was John Charters, clinging precariously to this wall, in a vile litter of evil-smelling filth.

With three leaps I was on the ground. "Alice, I—I'm sane!" I cried. "Don't touch me!"

But her arms were around my neck, and she was sobbing out her joy upon my shoulder.

**Next Month SPICY MYSTERY STORIES will
present another sensational story by
Lew Merrill, "Astral Murder"**



10

THE ANCESTORS OF BATMAN

by Will Murray

When Batman burst upon the newsstands in DETECTIVE #27, he not only took the nascent comic book world by storm, but sent shock waves through the pulp magazine world as well. Specifically, the storm centered around Leo Margulies' Better Publications, whose BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE had just inaugurated the adventures of a cowl'd crime-buster who wore a black, ribbed cape and styled himself the Black Bat.

As the late Bill Finger, scripter and co-creator of Batman, revealed in Jim Steranko's HISTORY OF THE COMICS: "It was a weird coincidence. Apparently this character had already been written and on the drawing board. Whit Ellsworth used to be a pulp writer for Better Publications. So through Ellsworth's intervention a lawsuit was averted. They were ready to sue us and we were ready to sue them. It was just one of those wild coincidences."

And it was. The first Black Bat novel, "Brand of the Black Bat," appeared in the July 1939 BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE while DETECTIVE COMICS #27 was cover dated May 1939. But actually the Black Bat had been created first. He was the work of the prolific Norman A. Daniels, who submitted that first novel on Dec. 6, 1938. Ironically, Daniels originally called his character the Tiger, but his editor requested that the character be revamped into more of a mysterious figure because he was going to appear in BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. So the Black Bat he became.

The Black Bat was a strict Shadow clone. He wore ordinary black clothes, a cape absolutely identical to Batman's, and a hooded cowl which lacked bat ears and exposed more nose than Batman's but was otherwise quite close. The Black Bat carried a .45 and wore black gloves like the early Batman. Both characters later donned finned gauntlets.

Like Batman, the Black Bat was a wealthy young man about town who fought crime by night. He was really District Attorney Tony Quinn, who lost his sight when criminals threw acid into his eyes. A secret eye transplant restored his vision and gave him supersight and the ability to see in the dark, but he pretended to be blind so he could become the Black Bat unsuspected (Daredevil fans, take note.) He wore the cowl to cover telltale facial scars.

Daniels, who wrote virtually all the 60-odd Black Bat novels under the G. Wayman Jones house name, gave only a cursory explanation for Quinn's decision to use a bat as his role model.

While discussing the need for a new identity with his aide, Silk Norton, Quinn decides he'll have to don a hood, and Norton suggests Quinn wear black so he can move in the shadows unseen. At this point, inspiration strikes Tony Quinn:

"But there must be some means of identification," Quinn pursed his lips. "Something by which men can recognize me. An insignia—a name, Silk—I have it! I've been blind—as blind as a bat. I still am so far as anyone knows. I shall prowl during the

night. Bats are blind and fly by night also. I'll be the bat, Silk. The Black Bat!"

But, originally, Bob Kane and Bill Finger didn't even do that much. Batman appeared without benefit of origin in a moody first story Bill Finger admitted was "a take-off of a Shadow story." Finger, who helped artist Bob Kane develop Kane's red-garbed, domino-masked original Batman concept into the familiar strange creature of the night, readily admitted to a strong Shadow influence. "My idea was to have Batman be a combination of Douglas Fairbanks, Sherlock Holmes, The Shadow, and Doc Savage," he once said.

Finger not only used old Shadow and Doc Savage novels as springboards but adopted various other ideas. Batman's utility belt was first used in *DOC SAVAGE*, for example, as were most of Batman's gadgets. Playboy Bruce Wayne might have been suggested by any one of the standard pulp playboys, Lamont Cranston or Richard Curtis van Loan, the hero of Better Publications' *PHANTOM DETECTIVE*. Commissioner James W. Gordon could only have been a nod to Commissioner James "Wildcat" Gordon, the fearsome alias of the star of Street & Smith's *THE WHISPERER*.

Finger also claimed to have conceived Batman's not-so-unique cape, and that a 1926 film, *THE BAT*, was the inspiration. The villain in that film wore such a cloak. But Finger, an avid reader of the pulps, might have been inspired by any number of pulp bat-men who roamed the popular magazines of the Depression.

The fact of the matter is that even the Black Bat was not an original character, as far as bat-men are concerned. You can go back to Mary Roberts Rinehart's book, *THE BAT*, or to the batlike suggestiveness of Bram Stoker's cloaked *DRACULA* (which partially inspired *The Shadow*, too).

During the pulp era there was the short-lived *BLACK BAT DETECTIVE MYSTERIES*. It featured a series of novelettes about an ordinary detective nicknamed, for no apparent reason, the Black Bat. Will F. Jenkins wrote the stories under his better-known Murray Leinster byline. But this rather undistinguished character is not likely to have influenced Finger.

One early villain in *THE SPIDER* was called the Bat Man. He appeared in "Death Reign of the Vampire King" (November 1935). He controlled an army of vampire bats and glided around on great artificial bat wings.

He was similar to the bat-men who were the minions of the villainous Emperor Zero in *BRAND OF THE METAL MAIDEN*, a Secret Agent X novel (January 1936). They wore leather outfits and hoods which covered their entire heads except for saucer-like goggles. Six-foot bat wings enabled these critters to fly.

By an interesting coincidence, another bat villain appeared in Better Publications' *PHANTOM DETECTIVE* just six months before their own Black Bat appeared. He was called the Bat, dressed in the usual regalia and was vanquished in "The Yacht Club Murders" (January 1939). The weird part about this is that the author was Charles Green, who would later script Batman in the Forties!

Better Publications seems to have had a preoccupation with bat-inspired characters. Their most interesting one was another hero who predated the Black Bat. Known simple as the Bat, he premiered in the first issue of *POPULAR DETECTIVE* dated November 1934 in "The Bat Strikes" by C.K.M. Scanlon.

Scanlon was a house name created by Leo Margulies to thumb his nose at those who frowned on the affair he was having with the woman he later married, Cylvia Kleinman. Legend has it that C.K.M. Scanlon stood for Cylvia Kleinman/Margulies Scandal. In



any case, the identity of the Bat series author is unknown — even to Jack Schiff, who was editing *POPULAR DETECTIVE* at the time and who later, much later, edited *BATMAN*. Schiff had completely forgotten the series.

While no one knows who this particular Scanlon might have been, there is at least one strong suspect. In style and character

treatment, the Bat stories are strikingly similar to the kind of stuff that Johnston McCulley was doing for Margulies around this time. McCulley was, of course, the creator of Zorro – himself a direct influence on Batman, ironically enough.

The Bat was a rather unprepossessing character, as far as bat-heroes go. He wore an ordinary suit topped with a shapeless black hood which covered his entire head. A white bat glowed on the forehead. He was really private detective Dawson Clade, who was framed for the murder of a wealthy philanthropist because his investigations were getting too close to underworld and political secrets. Sentenced to die in the electric chair, he is about to receive a parson from the governor when the latter is assassinated by criminals wielding a fatal dart gun.

But before Clade can be executed, wealthy businessman Martin Fenbeck steps in and, working with the prison warden who believes Clade is innocent, rigs the electric chair so the framed man appears to die, but doesn't. They spirit Dawson Clade to Fenbeck's cabin in the woods while someone else is buried in the detective's grave.

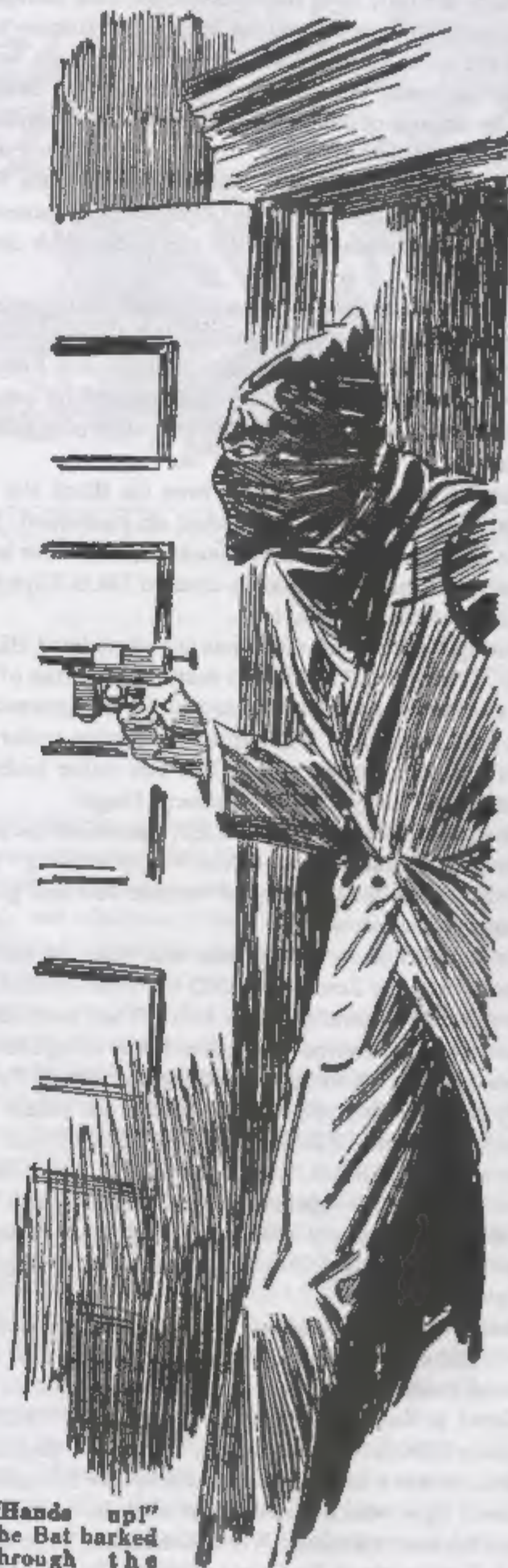
Now officially dead and therefore free of the murder charge, Dawson Clade hides out in the isolated cabin where he plans his revenge on the underworld.

But before we consider the Bat's origin, it might be worthwhile to review Batman's. Bob Kane and Bill Finger didn't get around to explaining Bruce Wayne's background until DETEC-

TIVE COMICS #33. In a two-page vignette, they first revealed that Bruce Wayne had witnessed the brutal double murder of his parents when a kid. Orphaned, he grew up to hate crime and vowed to avenge their deaths. After a course of training that might have made Doc Savage envious, Wayne sits in his study considering how to effect his revenge.

"Dad's estate left me wealthy," he muses. "I am ready. . . But first I must have a disguise.

"Criminals are a superstitious cowardly lot," he continues, "so my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. I must be a creature of the night, black, terrible. . . A. . ."



"Hands up!"
the Bat barked
through the
doorway.

The next panel is captioned: — As if in answer, a huge bat flies in the open window. Wayne looks up, startled, and exclaims those now-famous words: "A bat! That's it! It's an omen. . . I shall become a bat!"

The last panel shows the crouching image of Batman with the caption: "And thus is born this weird figure of the dark. . . This avenger of evil. The Batman."

Funny thing. Dawson Clade had a very similar experience back in 1934. For posterity, he is the unabridged moment of epiphany from "The Bat Strikes:"

As the door of the cabin closed behind the Governor's secretary, Dawson Clade dropped into a chair. He heard the roadster's motor start, and then the sound faded into the distance as Martin Fenbeck drove away.

Clade's brain was working swiftly. He realized that he was a dead man in the eyes of the world. He would not be able to appear in public unless he was carefully disguised. No one save Fenbeck and the prison warden knew or should ever know that Dawson Clade still lived.

Yet he was one man working alone against the crooks and the corrupt politicians who went hand in glove with the evil forces of the underworld. For that reason he must become a figure of sinister import to all of these people. A strange Nemesis that would eventually become a legendary terror to all of crimedom.

Clade rose and began to pace the floor. He was nervous, restless. Reaction had set in. What he had been through as he sat in the electric chair had left him shaky. Far more so than he had realized up to the moment.

He was still thinking. Just what the character would be that he intended to assume was still vague in his mind. He only knew that it would have to be some numbilous [sic] creature of the night that lurked in the shadows.

He glanced at the oil lamp burning on a table. Then he swung around, suddenly tense. In the shadows above his head there came a slithering, flapping sort of sound.

Clade leaped back instinctively as something brushed past his cheek. Again the flapping of wings—a weird rustling sound. Terror overcame him for an instant as something brushed against his hair, caught in a tangled lock. Something that seemed unspeakably evil.

He reached up, tore at it with fingers that had suddenly grown frantic. He flung the thing aside. As he did so he saw that it was a bat. An insectivorous mammal, with its wings formed by a membrane stretched between the tiny elongated fingers, legs and tail.

As the creature hovered above the lamp for an instant it cast a huge shadow upon the cabin wall.

"That's it!" exclaimed Clade aloud. "I'll call myself 'The Bat.'"

"BAT MAN" from SPICY MYSTERY STORIES (Feb. 1936)



Was he animal or was he human? Sometimes he loved the woman who had been his fiancée; at other times he cared only for his furry mate. What had happened to John Charters?

BAT MAN

THE glare of the lights terrified and blinded me. I crouched there, in a corner of the room, looking at the empty bed, and seeing, in the corridor beyond, women in nurses' uniforms passing from room to room.

I tried to fly, and discovered that my left wing was injured. I could only crouch there, shaking with terror, in spite of my frantic desire to fly round and round the walls of the little room, in search of some refuge beyond the reach of earth-bound creatures.

I saw a nurse with golden hair pass along the corridor, and that hair of hers seemed to me a haven of rest. If only I could fly to it and conceal myself within it!

For I had become a bat. A bat with a man's intelligence, a man's memories, striving to emerge from a confused mass of jumbled recollections.

"He's got the brain of a bat." Who



By
**LEW
MERRILL**

had said that? Roger Dean, who had transformed me into this low form of life, by grafting my brain into the body of one of my species. Roger Dean, who was jealous of me, and wanted to supplant me with Alice!

I had been ill a long time, but I couldn't remember just what had been the matter with me. I recalled vaguely that there had been business troubles, a quarrel with Alice. I had even thought of suicide.

What did it matter? I was a bat now, and soon they would discover that I had escaped from them, and they would catch me and put me in a cage, and rob me of my blessed freedom. For we bats are only able to live in freedom. You can't cage us. We die. And Roger Dean wouldn't want me to die. He wanted to gloat over me, and show me to Alice.

The prose is pure second rate Walter Gibson just as The Bat is a third-rate version of The Shadow. But the Bat stories, of which there are at least five, are full of little touches like those found in the early Batman stories.

The Bat likes to leave little calling cards imprinted with a bat symbol, for instance. The unknown C.K.M. Scanlon continually refers to his character as "the Bat, strange creature of the night." He doesn't kill. Instead he fells crooks with his "vapor gun." His police contact is Detective Sergeant Burdoon, who doesn't know his identity.

Coincidence? Well, consider these facts. Four individuals who were involved in the early Batman came out of Better Publications. Whitney Ellsworth, who wrote for the firm and later joined DC in an editorial capacity. Mort Weisinger, who was lured over to DC by Ellsworth and who became Batman's first official editor. (I should mention that Weisinger's first professional sale, "Rope Enough," appeared in an early POPULAR DETECTIVE along with a Bat story.) Jack Schiff, who edited POPULAR DETECTIVE and took over editing Batman during the war when Mort Weisinger lured him into comics. And Charles Green, a later Batman scripter who just happened to have created a villain named the Bat just before the Black Bat came along.

All of these interesting connections are coincidental. At least, according to Bill Finger's account of Batman's creation as given in the HISTORY OF COMICS, they are. And there's no reason to doubt him. He's frank about his influences.

But could the striking similarities between the Bat's origin and Batman's be a coincidence, too? Well, a lot of writers were busily imitating The Shadow in those days and a good portion of their efforts seemed to run to dark figures with bat imagery. It is possible that Finger just happened to have explained the already-extant Batman with the same idea C.K.M. Scanlon devised about five years previously. But then again, Finger was a voracious pulp reader and when you stack up all these coincidences, I think that this last coincidence is just one too many.

We'll never know for sure if Bill Finger ever read the Bat stories and deliberately or — equally likely as the Bat series is decidedly less than memorable — subconsciously borrowed that one scene, because Finger died several years ago. But if it is a coincidence, it's a wilder one than the synchronicity which saw the births of the Black Bat and Batman just months apart!

The Bat in POPULAR DETECTIVE:

"The Bat Strikes," Nov. 1934

"Bite of the Bat," Dec. 1934

"Shadow of the Bat," Jan. 1935

"Code of the Bat," Feb. 1935

"Blind as a Bat" (unpublished)

